

# The Illinois Tollway's

# EARNED CREDIT PROGRAM

Newsletter

January 2009

## Message from Albert Murillo, Chief of Procurement



Albert Murillo

Among the responsibilities of Chief of Procurement at the Illinois Tollway is administering and promoting the agency's diversity goals and programs.

I take pride in the fact that in 2008, the Tollway committed more than \$1 billion to construction projects, achieved 21 percent minority participation in construction contracts and 30 percent in professional services contracts, and provided incentives for contractors to hire 85 ECP candidates.

But in 2009, we want to do better.

Even though many of you are taking a well-deserved winter break; spring and, with it, construction's peak season will be just around the corner. I know this because of the calendar and because growing up, my father worked and eventually retired from many years of service as a construction laborer. Every spring, as other people dreaded anticipated inconvenience on the roads, I'd see my father grow restless and excited, knowing he would soon return to work.

The Tollway's \$6.3 billion Congestion-Relief Program – *Open Roads for a Faster Future* – has created employment and contracting opportunities at a critical time as our region and state face difficult economic challenges.

Through this capital improvement program, the Tollway is also improving service and adding new benefits for customers by reducing travel times across our 286-mile system through Open Road Tolling and the addition of the south extension of the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355) into Will County.

Our work continues with ongoing efforts to complete the systemwide roadway restoration on schedule and on budget. The rebuilding and widening work on the 50-year-old tollways throughout Northern Illinois is more than halfway complete and we are confident that our contractors will see this work through.

Building on our success, at the end of 2008 the Tollway launched a second capital initiative: the Congestion-Relief Program Phase Two – *Tomorrow's Transportation Today* – a \$1.8 billion program that includes a variety of interchange improvements and plans to introduce carpool/HOT lanes to

encourage ride-sharing and expand transit options for commuters. Through the Phase Two initiative, the Tollway will continue to provide new employment opportunities throughout the region.

ECP succeeds not because it is a requirement, but because it is an incentive program with tangible benefits for all. Assisting agencies get motivated candidates that employers want; unions increase membership; and employers earn bid credits that can help them submit lower bids than competitors for Tollway business. But most importantly individuals qualify for training, union sponsorship, placement, and job retention.

I've had many conversations with the Tollway's contractors that are using ECP credits regularly on their bids for future work, and they tell us they intend to accumulate more credits by hiring back "their" ECP participants.

Knowing well the eagerness of my father to take on new work, I am pleased to offer my skills and experience to help meet the challenges at hand aiding those looking for training and placement opportunities within the Tollway projects and expanding the ECP into other agencies.

## ECP Candidate Joey Dobbs Keeps on Truckin'



Joey Dobbs

Joey Dobbs had a 20-year career in inside sales, selling residential construction supplies.

But when the residential building market began to suffer, she eventually lost her job and had to look for a new career.

"At that point, I had no other way to go but up," she said.

Joey is the mother of a two children, ages 3 and 8, and the breadwinner for her family. Her husband has a genetic lung disease and had to stop working more than eight years ago.

Joey turned to the Rock River Training Center for the training she needed to start over.

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## ECP Candidate Joey Dobbs Keeps on Truckin'

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Since 1983, the Rock River Training Center has been helping people reach their employment goals through the resources they provide under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), including job search assistance and training. Rock River is one of the agencies that provide screening for the Earned Credit Program (ECP) in the Rockford area.



Joey Dobbs drives an off-road truck like this one.

Joey thought truck driving might be the way to go because of the flexibility and the need for female drivers. After she completed truck-driving school and received her license, she was screened as a participant in the ECP. Rockford Blacktop sponsored her into the Teamsters Union, employed her and trained her as an off-road trucker.

It wasn't long before she thought it was a mistake to become a trucker. Her first assignment was working on the East Riverside Boulevard Interchange improvement project on the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90), driving a maximum-hauling Volvo A40 Off-Road Articulating Truck. Her truck almost got stuck in mud several times, and she was afraid that it would slide off the side of the berm.

"At first, things were a little bumpy," she said with a smile. "It was rough work! I wasn't sure I could do it, but I stuck it out. Everyone was helpful and willing to answer my questions."

The experience made Joey more determined to learn as much as possible about heavy highway construction equipment to gain confidence and the skills necessary in her new line of work. "I will go through it or over it," she said, "and, look out, if there is a way, I am coming up."

## ECP Training Lottery

The Tollway hosted a "Training Lottery" on January 16 to choose 14 ECP candidates to participate in a five-day Aggregate Technician course.

The course, sponsored by the Laborers Union, is scheduled to take place February 2-6.

More training opportunities are coming soon for all current ECP Quality Control Inspectors.

## Lorig Construction Company Helps Build a Better ECP

With more than 20 years in the construction industry, David Lorig brings a wealth of expertise to the ECP Advisory Council, the group responsible for studying all the components involved – community, education, candidates and employers – that strengthen the ECP.

Lorig, president of the construction firm that bears his name, also serves on the Board of Directors of the Illinois Road and Transportation Builders Association and served as its president from 2004 to 2005.

Additionally, he has been an industry leader in labor issues for the past 20 years and serves as a director on multiple boards, including the Laborers Union Apprentice & Training Fund, which has been involved in the ECP.

"We believe in what the ECP is doing, preparing traditionally disenfranchised individuals for employment opportunities in the Illinois construction industry while providing valuable incentives for contractors to hire qualified ECP candidates," says Lorig.

Under Lorig's leadership, Lorig Construction Company was instrumental in putting together the ECP QC Inspector Training Program, along with the Laborers Union, IDOT and Plote Construction Inc.

And Lorig Construction itself has made the ECP Program one of the cornerstones of its own Quality Control Plan, says Lorig. In the 2007/2008 construction season, Lorig Construction hired seven QC Inspectors and plans to continue its efforts to support the ECP.

For the 2009 construction season, both IDOT and the Laborers Union will provide additional training for existing ECP QC Inspectors – a program Lorig wholeheartedly endorses.

"The additional training will ultimately benefit the companies that employ ECP candidates," Lorig says. "Additional training for existing candidates will help these individuals grow in their positions and careers by expanding their expertise and effectiveness as construction industry professionals."



Pictured here, from left, are Albert Murillo, Chief of Procurement; Ruth Porter, ECP Consultant; and Stephanie Stephens, General Manager of Diversity.



**Start Today!**

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